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NOFORN
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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/ANP
SUVA FOR AMBASSADOR MCGANN
DILI FOR ANDREA APPELL

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AS](#) [FJ](#)
SUBJECT: AUSTRALIA LIKELY TO OPPOSE POSTPONING PIF

REF: MCGANN-PLANT E-MAIL OF 20 JAN 2008

Classified By: Political Counselor James F. Cole; Reasons: 1.4 (b)(d).

SUMMARY

11. (C/NF) Australia is disappointed but not surprised that Fiji interim PM Bainimarama has opted not attend the January 27 Pacific Island Forum (PIF) Special Leaders Meeting in Port Moresby. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is expected to endorse a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) recommendation to proceed with the meeting as originally scheduled, driven primarily by the availability of Prime Minister Rudd. Australia has received preliminary indications that New Zealand, whose foreign minister will discuss Fiji with FM Smith in Perth on January 21, shares its view on holding the PIF meeting on January 27. In the meantime, PNG PM Somare will try to persuade Bainimarama to reconsider his decision, according to DFAT. End summary.

12. (C/NF) In the absence of Richard Rowe, First Assistant Secretary for Pacific Affairs, and Geoff Tooth, Assistant Secretary for Papua New Guinea and Fiji, we spoke with Stephen Henningham, Director for Fiji, on January 21 to assess Australian views on interim PM Bainimarama's latest maneuver to avoid attending the January 27 PIF Special Leaders Meeting. Henningham told us the GOA was "disappointed" that Bainimarama sought to put off the meeting, noting it was further evidence of his established pattern of evading accountability for his promise to restore democratic governance. The GOA dismissed as "flimsy and unconvincing" Bainimarama's protestations he could not attend because he needed to oversee flood relief. That was "an excuse, not an explanation," he said, pointing out that the crisis phase was long over, and Bainimarama could easily afford an absence of one or two days during the lengthy recovery phase.

13. (C/NF) Henningham said the DFAT consensus was that the PIF meeting should proceed as planned, regardless of Bainimarama's participation. Although final confirmation of Australia's position was pending at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, he said Prime Minister Rudd's long-scheduled travel plans to India and Davos, Switzerland immediately following the PIF made it extremely unlikely that there was any scope to shift the date. Moreover, he added, Port Moresby had already invested a great deal of time and effort in making arrangements for January 27.

14. (C/NF) Henningham disclosed the GOA had received early

indications that New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade had submitted a recommendation to PM Key on the importance of proceeding as originally scheduled. Restoration of democracy in Fiji was one of the key items FM Smith expected to discuss with New Zealand Foreign Minister McCully's in Perth on January 21, he added.

15. (C/NF) The Australian High Commission in Port Moresby had reported that PM Somare was very disappointed and concerned about Bainimarama's decision to pull out, and planned to try to persuade him to reconsider. Somare would take it as a personal slight if he refuses, according to Australian reporting.

16. (C/NF) Henningham said the GOA had also heard from PIF Secretary General Tuiloma Slade that, while he was publicly QSecretary General Tuiloma Slade that, while he was publicly expressing "disappointment," privately he was very upset at Bainimarama's handling of the issue, echoing his statement to Ambassador McGann (reftel.)

CLUNE